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Ravens defensive tackle and Alvin Ailey dancer swap moves to launch new school program

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Watch here: <https://www.baltimoresun.com/entertainment/bs-fe-ravens-alvinailey-20190423-story.html>



Few fans of football and modern dance will ever get to see the two worlds collide on stage. Tuesday afternoon at Henderson-Hopkins Partnership School, about 55 students from Henderson-Hopkins Partnership School and Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women witnessed just that as Ravens defensive tackle Brandon Williams cut the rug with Courtney Celeste Spears, a Baltimore native and a dancer with the acclaimed Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

Guided by dancer and educator Nasha Thomas, the dancer and the football player went through a series of slow pliés and other dance positions. The audience, primarily made up of teenage and pre-teen girls from both schools, fluctuated between laughter and hearty praise as Williams flubbed a few moves before successfully lifting Thomas and Spears (though not at the same time).

The event was called “Grace to Gridiron Show and Tell” and was the launch a four-day arts education workshop with the New York-based Alvin Ailey organization at both schools.

The workshop uses the late Ailey’s seminal dance piece “Revelations,” as a springboard for multidisciplinary lessons. Thomas took students from both schools through several activities and exercises that combine critical thinking and dance. Thomas, who performed with the company before heading up much of its national community outreach efforts, said that the workshop grew out of a desire to make dance part of a well-rounded education.

“We wanted something that we could take into schools that wasn’t what we called ‘dance as a discreet subject,’” Thomas said. “We were doing ballet, jazz, modern and tap dance residencies in schools, but we wanted something that would take us into the classroom.”

The school connected with Ailey through an existing partnership with The Lyric, where the company will be performing this week, according to Peter Kannam, principal of Henderson-Hopkins.

Ailey founded his namesake dance company with a performance in 1958. Over the ensuing 60 years, which the company celebrates with the anniversary tour bringing it to Baltimore this week, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater established itself as a hub and pipeline for black modern dance artists.

Williams never trained in ballet, but he does dance with his wife and children and sees arts as similarly crucial to children as athletics. “Kids need people to look up to, positive role models, giving them the okay to be themselves,” he said. “Dancing is just a part of me, so I want to spread that to as many people as possible.”